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ABSTRACT

At the Fayette Campus of Pennsylvania State University (which offers the first two years of baccalaureate education), volunteering faculty members are selected to serve as academic counselors during freshmen orientation on the basis of their student-orientation, motivation, realistic perspective on counseling objectives, and their willingness to be innovative and adaptive. An intensive two-day Counselors' Orientation Conference is conducted prior to freshman orientation to provide faculty with the basic information required to respond to freshman questions and to develop and refine their academic counseling skills. The training of faculty as academic counselors for freshman orientation is expected to enhance year-round instructional and academic advising. Information disseminated at the conference includes an overview of campus services and facilities, a review of the academic structure, and a summary of student data which includes scholastic preparation and grade expectancies. Through the use of slide-tape presentations and group interaction, faculty members learn how to interpret student test profiles, prepare and evaluate counseling interviews, and assist with appropriate course placement. Core faculty who have served as academic counselors use their acquired information and skills to train other faculty advisors. On-going evaluation of the program is being conducted, and will contribute to an in-depth analysis of the program. (DR)

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BEYOND ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT: THE IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF FACULTY TO FUNCTION AS ACADEMIC COUNSELORS

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The Pennsylvania State University
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BEYOND ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT: THE IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF FACULTY TO FUNCTION AS ACADEMIC COUNSELORS

Higher education in the 1980's will be characterized by an increasing concern for serving the educational needs of non-traditional as well as traditional students. To meet the educational requirements of students with diverse entry-level abilities and aspirations, a strong emphasis will be placed on personalizing the instructional process for each student. Individualized instructional strategies will become more evident as institutions place a high priority on developing and implementing approaches to accommodate students with diverse academic abilities.

Faculty development programs will become prominent as academic leaders recognize the importance of assisting professors to understand the "new student"[1] and to "discover, try, master and evaluate alternative ways to help each student learn."[2] Faculty in-service training programs not only will be concerned with the improvement of instruction but also will focus upon other functional areas to improve retention by facilitating a positive, personalized relationship between student and professor. Thus, the development of a comprehensive in-service training program for faculty must include academic advisement as one of the major functional areas.

This paper describes an in-service training program designed to train a group of faculty members to function as academic counselors (as differentiated from their traditional role as academic advisers throughout the academic year - September through May) during the freshmen counseling and advising

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[1] K. Patricia Cross, Beyond The Open Door: New Students To Higher Education (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971).

[2] Jack Lindquist, ed. Designing Teaching Improvement Programs (Berkeley: Pacific Soundings Press, 1978), p. 254.

program conducted at the Fayette Campus of The Pennsylvania State University. The program is designed to sensitize this group to the diverse academic abilities, interests, and aspirations of entering students who will eventually become members of their English, education, engineering, sociology, (etc.) classes. The ultimate objective of the in-service training of faculty as academic counselors is to enhance the instructional and academic advisement processes by facilitating a better understanding of the unique characteristics of each student, thus encouraging a more individualized approach to instruction and academic advisement.

CRITERIA USED TO SELECT ACADEMIC COUNSELORS

Before discussing the in-service training program, it is important to review the criteria used to select those members of the faculty who will serve as academic counselors. First, a faculty member must have a strong student orientation and should have demonstrated the ability to relate well to students, both academically and personally. Data collected during the school year concerning the faculty member's effectiveness as an academic adviser can provide considerable insight into the faculty member's suitability to function as an academic counselor.[3] Second, a professor must be genuinely interested in serving as an academic counselor. Participation is voluntary and should reflect an intrinsic motivation. Although a professor is reimbursed for serving as an academic counselor, a strong sense of commitment to the critical importance of academic counseling for entering students is essential. A third criterion

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[3]E. Daniel Kapraun and Doris W. Coldren. "An Approach To The Evaluation of Academic Advising," Journal of College Student Personnel ("On The Campus" section), to appear in Volume 21, No. 1 (January, 1980).

focuses upon a faculty member's willingness to be innovative and adaptive. The faculty member serving as an academic counselor assumes a role much different from the traditional role of teacher in a group setting. In-depth, one-to-one academic counseling requires a willingness on the part of the participating professor to invest the time and energy essential to develop the expertise necessary to perform the critical task of academic counseling. Fourth, a faculty member must have a realistic perspective concerning the nature and scope of the academic counseling process. The participating faculty member must realize that he is not expected or qualified to perform in-depth psychological counseling. Basically, the academic counseling process involves an evaluation and discussion of a student's academic abilities and interest for a particular program(s) of study.

COUNSELORS'ORIENTATION CONFERENCE

The in-service training program or Counselors' Orientation Conference is a two-day program designed to provide the faculty member with the knowledge and skills essential for effective academic counseling. The conference has two important dimensions. The first dimension focuses upon the dissemination of information to provide the academic counselor with that knowledge necessary to answer most of the questions that an entering freshman may ask. The second dimension of the Counselors' Orientation Conference relates to the development and refinement of academic counseling skills.

In regard to the first dimension, two types of information are presented: general information and student information. General information is classified as academic or non-academic information. The academic information, presented by the Fayette Campus representatives of the ten colleges of the University, focuses upon a review of the admission requirements, academic/career opportunities, and academic standards pertaining to the diverse programs offered

by the ten colleges. A slide-tape presentation entitled "Introducing the University to Freshmen"[4] summarizes much of the pertinent information which an entering student should know about the academic structure of the University. This slide-tape presentation also provides an excellent overview of the University for the academic counselors and is used to summarize those presentations pertaining to the dissemination of academic information. The non-academic information is presented by representatives from the Office of Student Affairs. Their information concerns support services such as career development and placement, financial aid, extracurricular activities and study skills.

Student information is defined as that information which is collected and analyzed concerning the academic background of each entering student. This information includes three items: Profile of Academic Abilities, Admission Profile, and Educational Planning Survey.[5] The Profile of Academic Abilities summarizes a student's Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, high school average, and Penn State placement test scores and recommends entry-level course work relative to English, mathematics, and chemistry. Grade expectancy data are also presented concerning a student's potential for success in the science[6] and the

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[4]The slide-tape presentation was developed by the Academic Information Coordinator of The Division of Undergraduate Studies for presentation to freshmen students during the pre-enrollment counseling and advising program.

[5]These forms have been developed by the Admissions and Division of Undergraduate Studies Offices of The Pennsylvania State University for use in collecting and summarizing pertinent academic data concerning each entering student.

[6]These programs require extensive course work in college-level calculus and science, predominately found in the Colleges of Agriculture, Earth and Mineral Sciences, Engineering, and Science.

non-science[7] oriented curricula of the University. The Admission Profile summarizes the essential information concerning a student's high school academic background and also provides a prediction for college success in verbal and quantitative subject areas. The Educational Planning Survey is a self-report instrument which presents considerable insight into a student's thoughts and perceptions concerning academic/career planning and related topics. This student information is presented to the academic counselors in the form of a mock student counseling folder similar to the counseling folder the academic counselor will receive concerning each student who participates in the counseling and advising program. Consequently, this information can be readily applied in the second dimension of the Counselors' Orientation Conference - the development and refinement of academic counseling skills.

The personalization of the general and student information for each entering freshman is the basic objective of the academic counseling process. To perform this vital task, the effective academic counselor must possess the following competencies: to perform test interpretations, to evaluate a student's academic preparation for a particular program (based on test results and supporting information), and to communicate to the student personalized information which will assist in the formulation of a realistic academic/career goal. Various activities are employed in assisting the counselor to develop these essential skills. Initially, a slide-tape presentation pertaining to the interpretation of the placement test profile summarizes the important issues to be considered when performing a test interpretation, including a review of the

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[7]These programs do not require extensive course work in college-level calculus and science, predominately found in the Colleges of Arts and Architecture, Business Administration, Education, Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Human Development, and Liberal Arts.

latest course placement recommendations relative to English, mathematics, and chemistry. Next, each counselor is asked to complete an interview preparation sheet for the student described in the mock counseling folder. Then, each academic counselor presents to the other counselors an evaluation of this student's academic preparation for a particular academic program. Through group interaction, counselors critique evaluations and write-ups of counseling interviews. Another exercise includes the critique of videotaped counseling interviews conducted during the counseling and advising program of the previous summer. The group outlines the positive and negative aspects of each interview and makes specific recommendations concerning ways to improve the academic counseling process. Important resource materials concerning test interpretation, the counseling process, and course placement actions are provided to the counselors for future reference.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The following strategies are being given serious consideration to enhance the academic advisement process across the total campus. The core faculty who have served as academic counselors in the summer or pre-enrollment counseling and advising program (termed the first stage of academic advisement[8]) will be employed as trainers of other faculty advisers. Since faculty members trained as academic counselors have acquired considerable knowledge and skill relative to the academic advisement process, these individuals are in an excellent position to influence the development of effective advising among their peers. An in-service training program sponsored by these faculty

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[8] Division of Undergraduate Studies: History, Mission, Goals, and Programs (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1978), p. 3.

should possess the credibility and expertise essential for the enhancement of second stage academic advisement in all colleges as represented on the campus. (All advising which occurs after the pre-enrollment counseling and advising program is termed the second stage of academic advisement[9].) Another future direction is to encourage the involvement of additional faculty members as academic counselors. Perhaps a rotation of interested faculty can be developed to permit each faculty member to function periodically as an academic counselor.

After a period of two years, an in-depth analysis of the program's impact will be conducted. Adviser evaluations and other evaluative approaches over this time span should provide considerable insight into the effects of the program. The collection and analysis of appropriate data will provide information to make effective managerial decisions concerning modifications essential to program improvement.

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[9] Ibid.

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